

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF MISSOURI  
EASTERN DIVISION

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, )  
                                  )  
                                  )  
Plaintiff,                    )  
                                  )  
v.                             )                                   Cause No. 4:21-cr-00262-SEP  
                                  )  
                                  )  
DEMORION LITTLE,            )  
                                  )  
Defendant.                    )

**SENTENCING MEMORANDUM FOR DEFENDANT DEMORION LITTLE**

COMES NOW Defendant Demorion Little, by and through his undersigned counsel, and in support for his request that the Court follow the parties' joint recommendation and impose a sentence of 28-years of incarceration in the U.S. Bureau of Prisons, states as follows:

**A. The Little Boys**

Lawanda Little had four boys whose names all started with the letter "D": Devin, DeJuan, D\_\_\_\_\_ (a minor) and Demorion.<sup>1</sup> D\_\_\_\_\_, the youngest, is now dead. He was shot and killed in February of this year at only 17 years old, six blocks from their home. DeJuan, the second youngest, is a paraplegic. He was shot and paralyzed in 2021 following his release from the Missouri Department of Corrections.<sup>2</sup> Dejuan and his oldest brother, Devin, both have pending

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<sup>1</sup> All the information in this sentencing memo comes from school, medical, mental health, and corrections records, as well as interviews and other primary sources. Supporting documents are available upon request for review by the court or parties.

<sup>2</sup> See State v. DeJuan Little, Case Number 1722-CR04840, Tampering with a Motor Vehicle 1st.

felony cases in state court.<sup>3</sup> Demorion, the second eldest of the “Little Boys,” comes before this Court today awaiting his sentencing in a very serious case.



**Lawanda Little with Demorion (left of Mom), Devin (right of Mom) and D\_\_\_\_\_ (the minor)**

Four boys with four dreams of escaping the cycle of poverty, violence, and crime in which they were raised. Not one of them was able to do so unscathed. D\_\_\_\_\_, unfortunately will never have the opportunity for a better life. But Demorion has not yet given up his dream. While he is extremely remorseful for his actions that bring him before the Court today, he still has hope that he may yet come out on the other side.

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<sup>3</sup> See State v. Devin Pollard, Case Number 22SL-CR04759, Possession of a Controlled Substance and State v. DeJuan Little, Case Number 20SL-CR01196, Unlawful Possession of a Firearm.

## B. On Their Own

Demorion was born on September 9, 1998, to 20-year-old Lawanda Little and 21-year-old Byron Elliot.<sup>4</sup> The second oldest of Lawanda's four boys, Demorion was raised in tremendous poverty during his upbringing.<sup>5</sup> "They had nothing," said Demorion's cousin, Latasha Helton. Lawanda always kept a job, working long hours in home healthcare, but it was not enough. She was a single mother and received very little help from any of the boys' fathers or their large extended family.<sup>6</sup> "My mom was essentially on her own," said Demorion. They bounced between houses, frequently unable to pay the rent, and the places they did stay were often unsafe. In August of 2006, a hotline call was made to Children's Division. When the assigned case worker from the Department of Family Services [DFS] went to do a home visit at Lawanda's residence, the conditions were so deplorable that the house was condemned<sup>7</sup> and the children were put into foster care, all in separate homes. The boys remained in care for nearly six months until Lawanda was able to find stable and safe housing and they were reunited.

<i>Initial Custody Date:</i> 08/11/2006
<i>Date of Last Home Visit:</i>
<i>Summary of Reason(s) Case was Opened</i>
Demarion came into care of Children Division, because his mother's home was uninhabitable and will be condemned.

<sup>4</sup> Demorion's father has legally changed his name and now goes by Usamah Mustafa.

<sup>5</sup> More than half of the children in the areas Demorion grew up in were living in poverty. "The Children of Metropolitan St. Louis 1995," *A Report to the Community from Project Respond*. Available at [https://www.visionforchildren.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/1995\\_Master\\_Copy.pdf](https://www.visionforchildren.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/1995_Master_Copy.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> In May of 2013, a contempt action was brought against Demorion's father alleging he was \$12,671.45 in arrears on Demorion's child support. Mo Family Support Div. et al v. Usamah Mustafa, Case Number 1322-FC01551.

<sup>7</sup> The family's living conditions also contributed to Demorion being hospitalized for breathing trouble multiple times prior to the age of two. He was also treated for high levels of lead in his blood around the same age.

**Records from Missouri Department of Family Services, Children's Division**

In addition to the impoverished circumstances, he was living in, Demorion's homelife could be described as neglectful at best, and abusive at worst. Working long hours and overnights, Lawanda was rarely home to supervise the boys, so they were left to fend for themselves. With a total lack of structure, Demorion and his brothers would get into trouble on their own, causing even more issues with their landlords and housing situation. Lawanda also struggled with diabetes and when she wound up in the hospital on numerous occasions, Demorion would be left alone to care for his two younger brothers.

**C. Tough “Love”**

Demorion's father was even more unreliable. Demorion recalls only seeing him eight or nine times during his childhood. Demorion describes him as “a deadbeat dad that would only show up to whoop me when I was in trouble.” Lawanda later explained to a caseworker that, “they do not have a relationship with Mr. Elliot and [Demorion] desires to remain away from him. She explained Mr. Elliot style of discipline is excessive when it comes to Demorion. She shares he attempts to “jump on Demorion,” which is too much. She further explained he has not had contact with Mr. Elliot for some time now.”

Yet however excessive she felt Demorion's father's “discipline” was, Lawanda believed equally in corporal punishment. Demorion experienced frequent “whoopings” growing up. In 2005, a worker at St. Louis Crisis Nursery<sup>8</sup> placed a hotline call to DFS regarding the excessive scarring on six-year-old Demorion's back and legs. The caseworker noted “many scars”

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<sup>8</sup> St. Louis Crisis Nursery provides a short-term, safe haven for 5,000 children a year, birth through age 12, whose families face an emergency caused by illness, homelessness, domestic violence or overwhelming parental stress. More information is available at [crisisnurserykids.org](http://crisisnurserykids.org).

including “thick longer curved scars he said [were from] mama’s orange belt that had holes in it.” Demorion was never removed from the home or provided services following this report.

Additional Information:

Malreatment Pathways:

Malreatment Pathway: Bruises/Visible Marks

1. How did you learn about this?

CHILD CAME IN THIS EVENING AT 8 P.M. ON 8-26 STAFF AT THE CRISIS NURSERY EXAMINED THE CHILD

2. When was child last seen? (By whom)

CHILD STILL AT THE CRISIS NURSERY UNTIL SUNDAY, 8-28, WHEN MOM IS TO PICK UP AT 1 P.M.

3. How did it happen?

CHILD GAVE VARIOUS EXPLANATIONS FOR THE INJURIES, NONE OF WHICH MADE MUCH SENSE.

4. Physical injuries? Describe (types, locations, sizes, shapes) Medical attention needed/obtained? Child’s current condition?

CONT = ON BACK OF DEMORION CALF. 2 THICK LONGER CURVED SCARS. HE SAID FROM MAMA’S ORANGE BELT THAT HAD HOLES IN IT.

SCARS ON SHOULDERS.

#### **Records from Missouri Department of Family Services, Children’s Division**

#### **D. Nowhere To Go**

Demorion’s external environment also provided no respite from his homelife. The neighborhoods he grew up in (The Ville, Walnut Park, St. Louis Place, and O’Fallon Place neighborhoods in North St. Louis) were rife with violence.<sup>9</sup> In October of 2014, when Demorion was 16 years old, his aunt and uncle were killed in Walnut Park within hours of each other.<sup>10</sup> His baby brother was murdered in The Ville neighborhood, six blocks from their home, in February.

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<sup>9</sup> These neighborhoods consistently have some of the highest rates of violent crime in the area. See “The Children of Metropolitan St. Louis 2001,” *A Report to the Community from Vision for Children at Risk*. Available at [https://www.visionforchildren.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/2001\\_CMSL\\_Master\\_Copy.pdf](https://www.visionforchildren.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/2001_CMSL_Master_Copy.pdf).

<sup>10</sup> Denise Hollinshead, “Brother and sister killed in separate shootings in St. Louis,” *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, October 19, 2014, available at [https://www.stltoday.com/news/local/crime-and-courts/brother-and-sister-killed-in-separate-shootings-in-stlouis/article\\_235258d0-9707-562f-93db-b15e209720d5.html](https://www.stltoday.com/news/local/crime-and-courts/brother-and-sister-killed-in-separate-shootings-in-stlouis/article_235258d0-9707-562f-93db-b15e209720d5.html).

Two months later, Demorion's uncle was shot to death on the front porch of their home at 4039 Kennerly.<sup>11</sup>



**4039 Kennerly Avenue**

Demorion has lost numerous friends and family to gun violence – in fact it happens so regularly it has become part of the fabric of his life. Everywhere he looked, Demorion saw the people in his life, particularly the men, in jail or dead.

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<sup>11</sup> Sam Clancy, "St. Louis man shot to death on his porch Wednesday afternoon," KSDK, May, 10, 2023, *available at* <https://www.ksdk.com/article/news/crime/man-shot-killed-greater-st-louis/63-846a95dc-2a15-40cc-932a-207bebef38>.

**ST. LOUIS – Teen boy found dead:** A teenage boy was found dead early Thursday in an alley in the Ville neighborhood of St. Louis.

Dontaevion Little, 17, was discovered in the rear alley of the 4200 block of St. Ferdinand Avenue about 2:30 a.m. Thursday.

Officers found him after a report of gunfire. Police said it's possible he had been shot but haven't yet confirmed that's how he died.

Police spokeswoman Evita Caldwell said the only information she had is that the teen had "puncture wounds."

Police said they have no suspects.

Dontaevion lived in the 4000 block of Kennerly Avenue, six blocks from where he died.

#### **Newspaper Article about Dontaevion's Death**

#### **E. No One To Help**

Yet despite the chaos surrounding him, Demorion's family and teachers described him as "a quiet kid who doesn't really bother anyone." Demorion's cousin, Deionte Jones, said that Demorion barely spoke growing up. He was always very serious—it was rare to see him smile. Demorion struggled at times in school, both academically and behaviorally. He had trouble staying in his seat, sitting still, and completing his work. He was diagnosed with ADHD<sup>12</sup> and an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) was created for him to receive services from Special School District, but two years later it was determined that he did not qualify for special school services and his IEP was discontinued.

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<sup>12</sup> As noted previously, Demorion was treated for lead exposure as a young child. Research has shown that "children exposed to lead are more likely than comparable children to suffer from a range of behavioral problems related to impulsivity and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)." Christopher Muller, Robert J. Sampson, and Alix S. Winter, "Environmental Inequality: The Social Causes and Consequences of Lead Exposure," *Annual Review of Sociology*, April 3, 2018. Available at <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-073117-041222>.



**Demorion's 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Graduation**

As Demorion became a teenager, he began getting in more serious trouble with his brothers and cousins and ended up in juvenile court. His paternal grandmother died during this time, eliminating one of the only stable figures in his life. During a treatment program at Preferred Family Healthcare, at 15-years-old Demorion said upon admission that he, “is not satisfied with the kind of person he is, does not look forward to the future, does not feel like he is good at making or keeping friends, does not feel like he is good at setting goals and making them happen . . . [and] does not feel like he is good at asking for help.” A psychiatrist at the same time described Demorion as, “preoccupied, helpless, hopeless, [and having] low self-worth.” Admitting that he felt sad most of the time, Demorion was diagnosed with bipolar disorder and prescribed medication.<sup>13</sup> Frustrated with himself, his mother, and society, Demorion felt like his future was inevitable.

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<sup>13</sup> Unresolved, untreated trauma is central to the development of multiple, severe, and persistent health and mental health problems and substance abuse. “The Damaging Consequences of Violence and Trauma: Facts, Discussion Points, and Recommendations for the Behavioral Health System.” Complied by Ann Jennings, Ph.D. for the National

#### **F. Surviving Alone**

At 16, Demorion ultimately found himself sentenced to the Division of Youth Services (DYS) where he would spend more than 14 months. During this time, he received only several visits from his mother, who had previously refused to do family counseling. His brother who promised to come see him, never did. His case worker noted that, “Demorion removes anything or anyone who frustrates, lets down or hurts him by not talking to people (i.e. mother, teacher, advocate, etc.) . . . [his mother] has only visited him once and his current coping method to dealing with this is just to not tell his mother of family day so he does not have to be disappointed.”

However, Demorion utilized this time to better himself. He got his GED. He began to work through some of the trauma of his childhood. He let himself dream of college, which he had never previously thought he would have the ability to do. He enrolled at St. Louis Community College for the summer after his release. He successfully completed three months of aftercare and was free from supervision.

But after his release, things began to fall apart again. Demorion’s financial aid for college didn’t come through. He was depressed after losing seven more friends and family within a year. He had trouble sleeping and dental pain for which he couldn’t afford treatment. He was unemployed, living with his mother without a car or driver’s license, and he was once again hopeless.

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Technical Assistance Center for State Mental Health Planning (NTAC) and the National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors (NASMHPD), 2004.

### **G. A Small Bright Light**

On October, 6, 2020, a small bright light began to shine in Demorion's dark world. His son, D\_\_\_\_\_ J\_\_\_\_\_ was born. This is his first and only child, and Demorion loves his son with his whole heart. He had big dreams for his son. Dreams for himself too, that maybe he could be a better father than anything he had ever known. As his only living parent, Demorion has held on to the fragile hope that he can remain a part of his son's life, even through a period of incarceration that will result in his son being an adult long before he is released. He still dreams of going to college, of starting his own business, and of one day escaping the cycle that he has lived in his entire life. While it is too late for his baby brother D\_\_\_\_\_, it is not too late for Demorion or his son.



**Demorion and his son, D\_\_\_\_\_ J\_\_\_\_\_.**

### **H. Conclusion**

Demorion has been through so much in his short life that it is at times easy to forget that he is only 25 years old. Despite having a large family, he has been left on his own for much of his life. Demorion does not want to diminish the severity of his actions or the seriousness of this case that brings him before the court. Decisions were made, lives were lost, that no amount of remorse on his part can change. Demorion is incredibly regretful of his actions and apologetic to the

families that have lost their loved ones. Yet despite the failures of those meant to protect him, he has not given up hope for a different life. He looks forward to becoming the best father he can be while he is incarcerated and to the resources that the Bureau of Prisons and the United States Probation Office has to offer him.

WHEREFORE, for the foregoing reasons the Defendant respectfully suggests that a total sentence of 28 years' incarceration is sufficient, but not greater than necessary to achieve the sentencing objectives of §3553(a), and he respectfully requests the Court honor the parties joint recommendation and impose that sentence; and for such further relief as the Court may deem just and proper in the premises.

Respectfully submitted,

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**CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE**

The undersigned counsel hereby certifies that a true and accurate copy of the foregoing was served upon all counsel of record on this 26<sup>th</sup> day of October, 2023, via the Court's electronic filing system.

/s/ T. Newton